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ABSTRACT

The language proficiency of four groups of children, Negro and white, in one southern community, Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, is examined. The goals of this study were threefold: (1) to study the development of language patterns in first grade children from these socioeconomic groups; (2) to determine the effectiveness of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test" as a predictor of reading achievement; and (3) by introducing one experimental oral language development program to some of the disadvantaged Negro pupils, to measure the effects of such a program on language development during the second year of school. Data were obtained from 200 beginning first grade pupils in the fall of 1969 with additional data gathered in April 1971. Analysis of the data revealed the following: (1) There is a significant difference in the language patterns of entering first graders in the four schools as measured by the phonology and morphology scores of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test"; (2) Differences in fluency rates of entering first graders at the four schools are not so great as those shown on the other two measures; (3) A study of the rate of change in the three language measures during the first year of school, experienced by Negro pupils in integrated schools and in segregated schools, was not significant; (4) Differences in reading scores were not significant between the experimental group and the control group during the second year of school; and (5) Correlations between the fluency scores and the educational level of the parents were not significant. (Author/LS)

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A TWO-YEAR INVESTIGATION of the RELATIONSHIP of ORAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY and READING ACHIEVEMENT of FIRST GRADE CHILDREN WITH a FRENCH LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

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A Two-Year Investigation of the Relationship of Oral Language Proficiency and Reading Achievement of First Grade Children with a French Linguistic Background

The fact that Blacks and other liguistically different learners have problems in learning to read standard English is well documented. To cite one cause as the reason why scores of disadvantaged children have failed to learn to read would be naive. However, recognizing the complexity of the problem, this study has focused on one aspect of the problem, namely the linguistic differences of the learners, and more specifically, on the way in which these differences have been handled by the schools. Horn, in the introduction to his book, Reading for Disadvantaged, summed up the schools' failure to cope with linguistic differences in the learning process.

> In addition to the health, social, economic, psychological, and linguistic problems that contribute to pupils' failure in reading and academic achievement, four other basic factors make failure or retardation inevitable or at least highly probable: (1) widespread ignorance on the part of practitioners concerning principles of language learning, for example, the erroneous belief that standard speech is attained by the memorization of rules of grammar; (2) frequent introduction of the decoding phase of initial reading instruction before adequate oral language development has occurred; (3) inadequate or nonexistent tests for assessing phonological and syntactical problems and oral language fluency in American English; and (4) teachers' inability or failure to diagnose and remedy oral language deviations that seriously inhibit learning to read in standard American English.

This longitudinal study was begun in an effort to explore some dimensions of the extent of these oral language differences in first graders in one geographic area, Lafayette Parish, Louisiana. The area is of particular linguistic interest since one finds three factors that relate to language: (1) second language influence in the speech of some of the residents, (2) a significant Negro population (approximately 25 percent of the total), and (3) an immigrant upper middle-class population brought in chiefly by the oil industry.

Lafayette Parish is located in that part of Louisiana known as "Evangeline Country." This area was settled by the Acadians after their expulsion from Nova Scotia in 1755. The saga of these people was made a part of our American literary heritage by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with his poem, Evangeline.

The Acadians who were monolingual speakers of French first arrived in Louisiana in 1764. Education for these early settlers consisted of learning the catechism and a few prayers by rote and being taught the domestic and agricultural skills necessary for survival. The average Acadian did not learn to read and write.

For over one hundred years the Acadians continued this pattern of life. The expansion of the public school system after 1900 brought the English language into the Acadian community. The language of instruction in the public schools of Louisiana has always been English and the Acadian who attended school was forced to use that language.

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Because the area has been bilingual for over 200 years, the English of the natives, both Negro and white, even of those who do not speak French, often shows French interference. Saville has summed up some of the syntactical differences in Acadian English:

The syntactical differences in the speech of speakers of Acadian English include the plural inflection of certain mass nouns. For example, hair is usually treated in the plural especially when a pronoun is employed. One hears <u>They look pretty today</u>, <u>You cut them yesterday</u>? Questions are regularly formed by using declarative word order with an interrogative inflection of the voice. The Acadian reads something <u>on</u> the newspaper. The Acadian child <u>saves</u> his school supplies in his desk. Phonological differences include deletion of the final consonants and substitution of <u>d</u> for the voiced <u>th</u> and <u>t</u> for the voiceless <u>th</u>.

The black community, although separate from the white, has felt the influence of the Acadian language and culture. When the Acadians arrived in the Attakapas country, there were already Negro slaves in the Louisiana territory. Anthony Crozat brought in the first shipment of twenty slaves in 1712. Church records indicate that there were Negro slaves in the Attakapas District as early as 1756. The population in Lafayette Parish is now 75 percent white; 25 percent Negro.

The Negro slave acquired from his Acadian masters the French language and the Catholic faith. Today he takes pride in these two characteristics which set him apart from the larger group of American Negroes. He is

somewhat inclined to regard the non-French speaking, Protestant Negro who comes into the community as an intruder.

It was because of the Acadian influence that French, or rather a dialect of French, locally called "Creole" or "Gumbo," is now the first language of most of the Negroes over thirty years of age who are natives of Lafayette Parish. Education has been slower to influence the Negro community. For example, 8.4 percent of the white population over twenty-five has had no formal education while 34.7 percent of the same segment of the nonwhite population has never attended school. Because fewer Negroes attended school and learned English, one finds many more blacks than whites who speak only French. One could conclude that the Negro child has more contact with a second language than does the white child. Also, as a general rule, the child from a more advantaged group or higher socioeconomic level has less contact with French than the child from the lower socioeconomic level of disadvantaged group.

After World War II, Lafayette became the office and supply center for the oil and gas industry of southern Louisiana. Besides the Acadian and Negro influences, this industry brought a third major element into the population, a group of upper middle class English speaking persons who are employed in executive positions.

This variety of population makes the area an interesting one from a linguistic point of view but creates certain problems for the educator. Supervisors and curriculum directors need information about the language

of the children to plan meaningful programs. Teachers must be given special training to deal effectively with linguistically different learners.

This study was an attempt to assess the degree of proficiency in Standard English production in beginning first graders from each of the three populations, Negro, Acadian and the more recently arrived oil industry population. By testing the oral language of the children at the beginning and the end of first grade, the study attempted to measure the development of the language of the children during the first year of school. The study also attempted to determine the effectiveness of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test" as a predictor of reading achievement. By introducing one experimental oral language development program to some of the disadvantaged Negro pupils, the study attempted to measure the effects of such a program on language development during the second year of school.

A second facet of the study, in addition to the experimental design, is the collection of samples of children's language to be used in teacher inservice workshops to create a greater awareness of the language patterns of the child.

The research design of this study was formulated to: (1) determine the effectiveness of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test" as a predictor of reading achievement of first grade children in Lafayette Parish Louisiana; (2) measure the growth in oral language proficiency after one year of school with no special program for oral language development; and (3) measure growth in oral language proficiency with a specific program of oral language instruction involving a sentence repetition technique.

As used in this study, oral language proficiency means the ability to produce the phonological and morphological features of standard American English, insofar as these features are measured by the test instrument employed. Obviously, this is a working definition of Standard American English necessary for a study like this. Primary methods of analyses involved an analysis of variance and an intercorrelation analysis.

The four schools selected were considered representative of the white urban schools, the Negro urban schools, the urban racially mixed schools and the rural racially mixed schools.

In the fall of 1969 the Lafayette Parish School System entered phase one of a two-phase plan for school desegregation. The freedom of choice plan, put into effect in 1967, had not achieved the desired racial balance in the schools. The new plan called for the pairing of white and black schools in the rural communities of the parish and rezoning in the city of Lafayette. Phase one involved the rural schools. Up to this point in time every rural community had two schools, one exclusively for the Negroes and the other for the whites. By pairing the schools, grades one through four were placed in one school and grades five through eight in the other. All pupils in the district enrolled in a given grade would attend school at the school in which that grade was taught without regard to race. The rezoning process which was to take place in the city of Lafayette in the fall of 1970 would accomplish basically the same thing by re-drawing the boundary lines of a number of school districts.

Initially it was decided to take a random sample of fifty first graders from each of the four schools. However, fearing that a random sample might not include any Negro pupils in the three predominantly white schools, we tested all of the Negro pupils in those schools. Thus, at Edgar Martin School, two Negro pupils were tested and a random sample of forty-eight selected from the white first grade population of 176. At L. Leo Judice seven Negro pupils were tested and a random sample of forty-three white pupils was selected from the total white first grade population of 133. At Alice Boucher fourteen Negro pupils were tested and a random sample of thirty-six white pupils was selected from the total white first grade population of 140. No white pupils were enrolled at Vermilion in the fall of 1969 when the study was begun. The original sample was 200 first grade pupils: 127 white pupils and seventy-three Negro pupils, twenty-three of whom were enrolled in predominantly white schools.

A survey revealed that some French was spoken in over three-fourths of the homes from which the children in the sample came at Vermilion, Alice Boucher, and L. Leo Judice schools. Children at Edgar Martin have almost no contact with French.

The test-instrument employed in the study was the Gloria and David Test of Oral English, the sentence repetition portion of the test has been discussed in detail by Dr. Natalicio. The fluency portion of the test employs another filmstrip using pictures of the children seen in the first section of the test. In prerecorded instructions the subjects

are directed to describe the five pictures as they appear on the screen. This test yields a measure of fluency in the form of a count of the number of words spoken in the 150 seconds allotted to the subject for verbalization.

The entire sampled population was tested twice, in the fall of 1969 and in the spring of 1970.

In order to record each test, 300 feet of one mil Mylar tape was allowed. The tape was fed from seven inch reels onto three inch reels. At the end of the test the tape was cut and the three inch reel containing the child's responses was placed in a container marked with his name and code number. At the end of each testing session the tapes were rewound and a piece of leader tape on which was written the child's name and code number was spliced onto the tape containing his test. Later the examiner evaluated each tape individually by listening to it through a set of headphones.

Phonology: The first four sentences of the phonology test were considered "practice items" because some subjects required prompting from the test administrator before they understood that they were to imitate the model. Actual scoring began with sentence number five. As the examiner listened to the tape, she circled an individual score sheet to indicate the gross differences in pronounciation made by the child as he repeated the model. Deviations were circled, counted and then subtracted from the total number of phonemes in the instrument in order to compute the raw score.

Morphology: The thirty-six sentences considered in computing the

phonology score also generated the morphology score. These thirty-six sentences contain seventy-two nouns, thirty-six verbs and twenty-seven pronouns and possessives. A subject earns one point for each of these words he inflects as presented by the model voice in standard American English giving a possible total score of 135. Words inflected in other ways were circled on the score sheet and the way in which the subject handled the inflection was indicated.

Fluency: To score the fluency test, the investigator transcribed by standard orthography what the subject had said about the five pictures in the 150 seconds allotted to him. A word count was then made which constituted the raw score.

With the encouragement of Dr. Harley Smith and Mrs. Augustine Ventroy, principal of Vermilion School, an oral language development program was begun at that school during the second year of the study. The Gloria and David Beginning English series was chosen. This is a taped series of lessons that can be used by pupils with very little assistance from a teacher. The instructional technique involves listening to standard American English sentences and repeating them. From the original sample tested at Vermilion School, twenty pupils were selected to receive the oral language instruction and another twenty were designated as the control group.

Equipment needed for the program included a DuKane filmstrip viewer, an Assistant machine to play a tape cartridge and an external speaker, This equipment was set up in a small room used for individual testing

and tutorial work. A teacher's aide, Mrs. Gladys Dugas, was instructed to operate the equipment and placed in charge of the program. The children came in groups of five and worked for ten minutes a day with the materials. The program was begun on September 7, 1970, and was continued through February 25, 1971.

The writer interviewed the second grade teachers to determine what kind of instruction in oral language was being given in the classrooms. All of the teachers had "show and tell" type activities once or twice a week, giving the pupils an opportunity for self-expression. The only formal training in pronunciation was given by speech therapists to children with pathological problems. None of the children in the sample was receiving this assistance. All of the teachers said that they sometimes corrected a pupil's pronunciation on an informal basis. The teaching of formal English usage or grammar was not part of the second grade curriculum. Again teachers reported that they made corrections on an informal basis. These factors the experimental and control groups shared. In addition, the experimental group had ten minutes per day working on the oral language materials for a total of 107 school days, making a total of seventeen hours and fifty minutes spent in listening to and repeating standard English sentences.

On February 26 through March 2, 1971, the writer retested the children in the experimental and control groups, following the same procedure as outlined above.

As part of the regular testing program in the Lafayette Parish School

System, the primary battery of the SRA Achievement Tests are administered in the spring to second graders. This year "Form D" of the test battery was given from April 12th through April 16 th, 1971, under the direction of Mr. Ray Miles, Supervisor of Testing and Guidance Services. Mr. Miles and the principals of the four schools were most generous in supplying the writer with the reading data from these tests for each of the pupils in the sample.

One of the goals of this first grade language research was to obtain information that would be helpful to teachers working with linguistically different children. It must be remembered that as this study was begun, Lafayette Parish was entering phase one of a two-phase plan for desegregation of its school system. This plan called not only for pupil desegregation but also for integration of teaching staffs of all of the school system. This meant that in the school year 1969-70 a number of teachers would come in consistent contact with linguistically different children for the first time. We found that for many of these teachers it was their first teaching assignment, and they entered it with a sincere desire to succeed. It soon became apparent to the supervisory staff that good will was not enough; special training was needed. When Mrs. Frances Faulkenbury of the Head Start program discussed with Dr. Smith the communication problem some of her teachers were having with their pupils, he suggested that perhaps some of the language samples we were obtaining in the research project could be used to make teachers aware of the linguistic differences of their pupils.

After conferring with the writer, Dr. Smith concluded that the objectives of the workshop would be threefold: (1) to make teachers aware of the language patterns of the children, (2) to stress the fact that the language of the children is a viable linguistic system; and (3) to show that standardized tests often label a child as "non-verbal" when he is merely linguistically different. Language samples obtained in the present study and in the writer's investigations involving fourth grade Negro pupils were used in the workshop. Recorded language samples illustrating the phonological and morphological differences in the children's language patterns were played. Discussion centered around the consistency with which the patterns were employed by the children and around other patterns and lexical items that the teachers may have noticed the children use. Especially interesting to the teachers were those patterns that seemed to be caused by French interference. The teachers agreed to make note of these patterns and lexical items that might be useful in preparing oral language instruction for the children.

The workshop was repeated for the kindergarten teachers of the parish at the request of Mrs. Marvene Bonnette, Acting Supervisor of Kindergartens for Lafayette Parish. Later a form of the workshop was presented at a number of the schools in the parish as a part of the in-service faculty study meetings. It was felt that the change in attitude toward the language of the linguistically different child that had taken place among many of the teachers has been an important result of the study.

Federal desegregation plans are currently being put into effect in the South. The disappointingly low academic achievement level of the Negro child has been a major concern of educator and parent alike. That the Negro child lags behind his white peers is well documented. The current search is for causes and cures. In this spirit, this study sought to examine the language proficiency of four groups of children, Negro and white, in one southern community, Lafayette Parish, Louisiana.

The goals of this study were threefold: (1) to study the development of language patterns in first grade children from these socioeconomic groups; (2) to determine the effectiveness of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test" as a predictor of reading achievement; and (3) by introducing one experimental oral language development program to some of the disadvantaged Negro pupils, to measure the effects of such a program on language development during the second year of school.

Data were obtained from 200 beginning first grade pupils in the fall of 1960. Additional data were added during the course of the study which ended in April, 1971. Statistical techniques used were a groups-by-trials analysis of variance, an analysis of variance and an inter-correlation analysis. The design included fourteen basic null hypotheses.

Subsequent analyses of the data revealed the following:

(1) There is a significant difference in the language patterns of entering first graders in the four schools as measured by the phonology and morphology scores of the Gloria and David "Oral English Test". The urban white school shows the highest mean score and the urban Negro school the lowest.

(2) Differences in fluency rates of entering first graders at the four schools are not so great as those shown on the other two measures. Again the urban white school shows the highest mean score. The urban black school is second with the rural racially mixed school and the urban racially mixed school following in that order.

(3) A study of the rate of change in the three language measures during the first year of school experienced by Negro pupils in integrated schools and Negro pupils in segregated schools was not significant. This would seem to indicate that in order to learn standard English production, the Negro pupil needs special instruction. An integrated environment alone is not enough.

(4) A study of the rate of change in phonology and morphology scores during the second year of school experienced by Negro pupils receiving the experimental oral language development program and Negro pupils in the control group showed a significant difference. ($P > .0001$) in favor of the experimental group. In phonology the pretest mean for the experimental group was 558 of a possible score of 616; the post test mean was 601. For the control group the pretest mean was 563; the post test mean was 575. In morphology the pretest mean for the experimental group was 112 of a possible score of 135 while the post test mean was 125. For the control group the pretest mean was 114; the post test mean was 118. Differences in reading scores for these two groups were not significant.

(5) There is a significant correlation between reading achievement scores and the phonology and morphology measures of the Gloria and David

"Oral English Test," i.e., phonology pretest, .3482; phonology post test, .4685; morphology pretest, .4010; morphology post test, .4733. These correlations were all significant at the .01 level. Correlations between the educational level of the father and the scores on the Gloria and David "Oral English Test," i.e., phonology pretest score .4346, morphology pretest score .5514. In like manner, significant correlations were found between the educational level of the mother and these two measures, i.e., phonology pretest score .2745 and morphology pretest score .3754. These correlations were significant at the .01 level. Correlations between the fluency scores and the educational level of the parents were not significant.

To end on a happy note, I am able to report that some positive steps toward curriculum modification were taken as a direct result of this research. The language samples were used in workshop sessions with teachers to increase their awareness of the language patterns of the linguistically different child. The supervisors reported, not only an increased awareness of language differences as a result of the workshops, but also and more important a marked change of attitude toward the linguistically different child and his language.

An ESEA Title VII Bilingual Program was begun in the parish in an effort to teach in the first language of the child while assisting him to learn a second language and/or dialect. Most recently a number of oral language programs aimed at teaching standard English as a second dialect have been inaugurated under Title III as an experimental basis.

It is too early to report hard data from any of these programs, but teachers are enthusiastic about the response of the children. The important factor is that the administration is aware of the learning problems of the linguistically different child and is making an honest effort to adjust the curriculum to meet his needs.